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ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN

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ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN

Recollections by

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
<i>Boyhood</i> , by Mrs. E. W. Symons	3
<i>Some Reminiscences</i> , by Dr. A. W. Pollard	39
<i>"Shropshire Lad" Year—and After</i> , by Laurence Housman	45
<i>A London Memoir</i> , by Professor R. W. Chambers	51
<i>Scholar</i> , by Alan Ker	61
<i>Cambridge</i> , by A. S. F. Gow	67
<i>Poet</i> , by John Sparrow	75
<i>Farewell to A.E.H.</i> , by N. V. H. Symons	81

ILLUSTRATIONS

A. E. Housman, from the drawing by Sir William Rothenstein in Trinity College, Cambridge . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
The Valley House, Fockbury, birthplace of A. E. Housman	PAGE 6
Fockbury House, originally called The Clock House, c. 1859. From a photograph taken by Edward Housman . . .	10
Perry Hall, Bromsgrove, showing the ancient ruined wall. From a photograph taken in 1927 by Robert F. A. Housman	10
A. E. Housman: At School, 1877	18
Sketch added to a letter of congratulation from A. E. Housman to his sister Katharine, 1887	26
Autograph of a contribution to "Ruthless Rhymes" by A.E.H., also added at the end of a letter	26
Sergeant George Herbert Housman. From a photograph taken in March, 1901, before he embarked for South Africa	36
A. E. Housman: In London, 1896	50
A. E. Housman, from a drawing by Francis Dodd, 1926 . . .	68
"Curiosities of Literature." From a drawing in <i>Punch</i> . . .	74

The following memoirs have been written by friends of the late Alfred Edward Housman, and they were published originally at Bromsgrove School as a tribute to the memory of this great scholar and poet. It is now proposed to perpetuate his name by establishing a Scholarship Fund at Bromsgrove School. The Fund will be vested in the Governors of the School and its income will be used to enable promising boys from the School to proceed to the University of Oxford or of Cambridge, or to prolong their studies at one of these Universities. The details of the scheme will depend on the amount of the Fund.

The profits from the sale of this book as of the English edition of this memorial will be allocated to this Fund. Subscriptions to the Fund are invited and they will be gratefully acknowledged. Cheques should be made payable to "A.E.H. Scholarship Fund," and crossed "Lloyd's Bank, Bromsgrove." They should be sent to the Headmaster, The School House, Bromsgrove School, Worcestershire, England.

ALFRED EDWARD HOUSMAN

BOYHOOD

IN the year 1936, there can be few people living who knew Alfred Edward Housman in early life and during his school days. On April 30th of this year, at the age of 77, he ended life so much of an enigma to those who care most for his brilliant scholarship and his poetry that a record of what he was in boyhood may be welcome and help to give insight to his character.

Without doubt Bromsgrove School moulded the direction of his after-life; but deeper influences within himself and in his home surroundings both drove and checked him in the exact path he took.

As one of his sisters, writing of him for *The Bromsgrovian*, I shall tell of his boyhood with home and school combined—as must be for a day-boy. He entered the School in September 1870, elected in July, four months after his eleventh birthday, as a Scholar on Sir Thomas Cookes' New Foundation. He was one of the twelve Scholars who first replaced the old Blue Coat boys of the School. No more were boys in breeches and skirted coats and knobbed caps to be seen in Bromsgrove. The new

BOYHOOD

Scholars wore mortar-boards like the rest of the boys; that was the only sort of cap worn in the School through the school days of A.E.H., purple and black tassels forming added distinctions allowed to Sixth Form boys and Monitors. At that time the School was known as King Edward's School, or the Grammar School, in the belief that it was one of the Latin Grammar Schools of King Edward VI. Inconsistently enough, till 1870 gave a new status to Foundation Scholars, the Foundation boys alone had not been taught Latin grammar. The name King Edward's School was dropped when it was discovered that no endowment had come from Edward VI, but only a Crown grant under the Chantries Act of his reign in place of an earlier endowment then confiscated.

A.E.H. was the eldest of five Housman brothers who successively gained election onto the School Foundation when about eleven years old; and he belonged to a family already connected with the School. Two of his paternal uncles had been boys at the School, besides other relatives of the name of Housman, and Brettell. For some unexplained reason, the first name on the Scholarship Board then in the Hall was that of his uncle Joseph Brettell Housman, though many Scholars' names should have been before his. Two generations earlier, his great-grandfather, Joseph Brettell, a Bromsgrove Attorney, was a Governor of the School, who sent his sons there, and had probably been a boy there himself, as his home was at Finstall House. Herbert Spencer in his Autobiography claims a Huguenot descent from the stem of these same Brettells. His first chapter is largely about the Brettells, to whom he ascribes

BOYHOOD

some of his own characteristics. His ancestor was a Joseph Brettell, first cousin to Joseph Brettell of Bromsgrove.

The father of A.E.H. was Edward Housman, of Perry Hall, Bromsgrove, whose father, the Rev. Thomas Housman, had married Joseph Brettell's daughter Ann, and had come first to Bromsgrove in 1836 as Assistant Curate of the Parish Church. He preached the Founder's Sermon in 1839, soon after coming with his wife and family to live with the widowed Joseph Brettell at The Clock House, Fockbury, two miles from Bromsgrove.

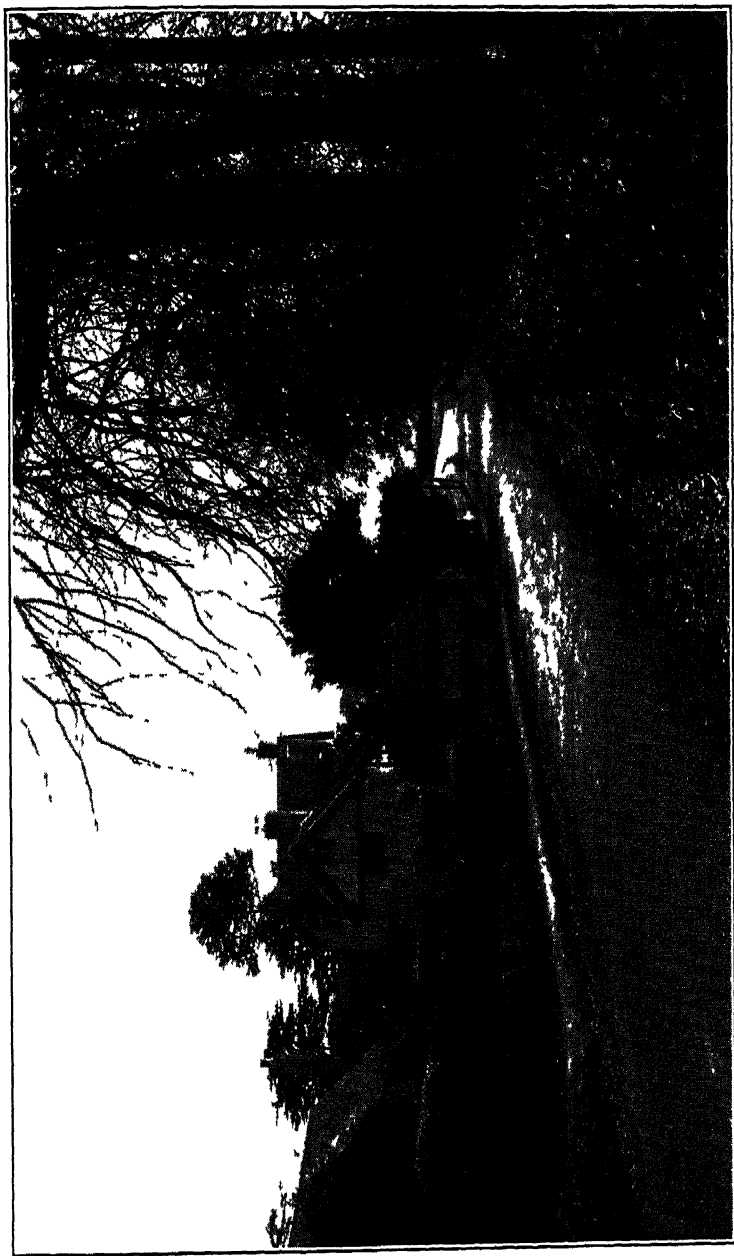
The Clock House was part of wide estates that had come to Joseph Brettell through his marriage with an heiress, Ann Holden. From part of the house, dated 1640, an ancient clock used to give time to the little hamlet of Fockbury; but it was taken down when alterations and extensions were made to the house to accommodate the growing family of Housmans. For a time, the house lost its old name as well as its clock, and was called Fockbury House, except by elderly villagers of Bournheath, who knew better and still spoke of it as "The Clockus." Clock and name have now been restored, and to us it seems to be a house with two names. In 1838, the parochial district of Catshill, which includes Fockbury, was formed out of the huge parish of Bromsgrove, and a new church built. Our grandfather was made the first Incumbent of Catshill, and, as there was no Vicarage, Fockbury House became the Parsonage. Two and a half years after A.E.H. entered the School this house became our second home, and all through the rest of his school life he lived there.

When A.E.H. began school he was a small quiet boy,

BOYHOOD

solemn and studious. In his early days he was nicknamed Mouse, and boys would tread on him pretending they had not seen him. Quiet and studious he remained all his school days, yet by no means the sort of boy to be down-trodden. He had a determined personality, able to take his own way, and yet to avoid troubles. I cannot imagine his ever receiving punishment either at home or at school; and his life as a day-boy ran with little room for oppression from school fellows. He took no part in games or athletics; he did not care for them, and they were not pressed on day-boys. So his life was shared between school work and occupations of his own choosing. School life was pleasant and engrossing to him, partly because of his natural liking for book-learning, and partly on account of school successes. He did well. Good places in Form came to him, prizes, certificates, and praise. As he rose in the School he was with a set of boys above the average in ability. They were interested in their school work, and A.E.H. was made welcome in the Studies whenever he was able to work there. While living at Fockbury he habitually worked in the Studies during the long mid-day interval on whole-school days, for the two-mile walk prevented home-going then. In return, his school friends, and sometimes masters, would make the two-mile walk to his pleasant home on Sunday afternoons, to enjoy the fruit and the refreshment to be found there.

When the end of A.E.H.'s school days came in 1877 seven or eight boys of the Sixth Form with whom he had been working for years had gained Scholarships or Exhibitions to Oxford; but his Scholarship of £100 per annum



THE VALLEY HOUSE, FOCKBURY

BOYHOOD

to St. John's College was the chief of them. In his last term he took the Senior Wattell Prize, and the Prizes for Greek and Latin Verse. In his Oxford and Cambridge Leaving Certificate he gained distinctions in Latin, Greek, French, and History. Looking at the list of all the prizes gained by him at school, it is interesting to see that prizes for English Verse fell to him in the years 1873-4-5. One of the school books used by the Fifth and Sixth Forms in his time was Greek Verse of Shrewsbury School. He little thought that Shrewsbury School when he died would give a place in *The Salopian* to a Greek Verse in his honour—as was done in May 1936 under the title "A.E.H."; or that a poem of his would be sung at Shrewsbury by the whole School in unison in memory of him on Speech Day 1936.

The Scholarship-ending to A.E.H.'s school days must have been one of the happiest events of his life. His foible seems to have been a desire to excel in things undertaken by him. Through his Scholarship, new progress lay before him on lines attractive to him, comparable to his entry into the School as a Foundation Scholar. But when the school days of A.E.H. ended, the man who went to Oxford was not entirely the work of the School, nor did the School see a side of him that he kept for his home. This side developed at Fockbury as we grew old enough to become companionable. Before then, he had been thrown a good deal on his own resources. His next brother, Robert, was a delicate little fellow, full of fun and mischief, but troubled by asthma. For three years in the early 70's Robert was sent away for health's sake to the Sydney College, Bath. Previously, the brothers had gone together to a little school

BOYHOOD

kept by a Miss Johnson. Left without his brother, Alfred found companionship with his parents, occupation in his school work, and friendship in books which he began to read voraciously. His parents' joy, and his, in his first School success was overcast by an advancing shadow. His mother was dying slowly and painfully, and her death came on the day of his twelfth birthday, March 26, 1871. At the time, he was spending his Easter holidays in the family of her greatest friends, at Woodchester, which was her old home.

A tender attachment had existed between mother and son; and this cruel loss to him seems to have roused in him an early resentment against nature's relentless ways of destruction. His own death made evident the faithful memories of her which he never ceased to cherish. Every scrap of writing that he had received from her or about her was preserved; and right on from the day of her death he maintained an enduring attachment to the family who supported him through his bitter hour; year by year, whenever possible, he visited them till death took them, too, away one by one.

Death—that cuts short both joys and sorrows—became an obsession with him, very evident in after-life, but already there in boyhood, though less noticeable. We saw nothing of this then, and we never talked of our loss among ourselves. It was never Alfred's way to speak of troubles. He was sensitive and easily wounded, but wounds he bore in silence. In silence too he carried his successes, a form of modesty, or of pride, preventing ostentation or boasting.

BOYHOOD

I believe he held a silent longing for praise and appreciation, but he would do nothing to elicit it.

Country influences worked strongly in making A.E.H. the man he became; and his mother's homeland shared with his father's an abiding love that sank deep. Mentally, his great abilities were probably derived from his mother. Her father, John Williams, D.D., Rector of Woodchester, was an accomplished scholar—a successful tutor as well as a parish priest. He was a leader in bringing hymn-singing into Church of England services, himself composing and printing hymns and metrical versions of the psalms for use in his church. His lore in classical languages enabled him to translate the works of early bishops from Greek verse into English; and apparently his faculty for versification passed on to his daughter and to more than one of his grandsons.

The move to Fockbury in the spring of 1873 was a great joy and excitement to us, for though we loved Perry Hall, we loved more the thought of country life at Fockbury. Our grandparents had left Fockbury House in 1868, and as it was empty again in 1872, we moved into it. The house and other property had come to our grandmother on the death of her father in 1847, and with it came many relics of the Holdens. On an attic floor were piled the remains of a library dating from the time of Caxton, which included an emblazoned pedigree, certified by Sir Wm. Dugdale in 1682, showing two lines of Holden descent from the days of Henry II. The bewigged portrait of the Holden who had the pedigree made was at Fockbury, and it found its way into A.E.H.'s rooms at Trinity College, Cambridge,

BOYHOOD

when our home was broken up many years later. Some odd sentiment made him also retain and transfer to Cambridge a large botanical collection made by Holdens c. 1690. This herbarium volume and the pedigree have now been deposited in the Birmingham City Museum, for, originally, they came from Woodend House, Erdington, Birmingham, a beautiful Tudor house—now demolished—the main seat of the Holdens and built on a site occupied by them when they were hereditary Rangers of Sutton Chase from the reign of Edward III till the Chase was destroyed by Henry VIII. The last family holder of Woodend House was our uncle, the Rev. Joseph Brettell Housman, previously mentioned.

A.E.H. was not insensible to the charm of an ancient lineage, with the hereditary link that connected him to the countryside. For him, the move to Fockbury was almost a return to his birthplace, for he was born at The Valley House, very near to The Clock House. In this pretty little house, now despoiled of its creepers, our parents spent the first year of their married life. From The Clock House, it stands a little way down the road to the nearest village, Bournheath, on the right-hand side, looking through trees across the road to fields leading to The Valley Farm and the Valley Woods. It had become a little school for girls when we were living at Fockbury.

About the time when A.E.H. was born in this house, Perry Hall became vacant through the death at the age of 91 of our father's great-uncle, Captain John Adams, with whom he was working as a Solicitor. John Adams—a famous Bromsgrove Worthy—held the post of Government



FOCKBURY HOUSE, ORIGINALLY CALLED THE CLOCK HOUSE



PERRY HALL, BROMSGROVE

BOYHOOD

nt for Stamps, and other important appointments. He built Perry Hall from the ruins of an ancient house of name; and on his death it became the property of our dfather. Naturally, it was made the home as well as place of business for our father, all of us except Alfred g born there. A fragment of wall with mullioned lows belonging to the original Perry Hall still flanks front lawn.

memento of the days before the move to Perry Hall made is a photograph of Fockbury House showing the parson on the lawn with his first grandson sitting in nother's lap beside him. The photograph was taken ur father, and the house does not appear very ancient for it shows the wing added by our grandfather to room for his family.

hen A.E.H. was born, to commemorate the event a chestnut tree was planted in the side garden of Perry ; and another chestnut was planted as each of us was . When we moved from Perry Hall to Fockbury, these were moved too, and presented to Catshill Church, bare of trees. They were successfully transplanted into churchyard, and set in the order of our ages along the ern and northern walls. Alfred's tree was planted st to our family graves in the south-west corner of the chyard. Some time ago it came to grief through age orm and was cut down to a stump, which, however, ited instead of dying. The smallest of the trees was eaten by a cow, and did not sprout again. The six ining chestnuts show by their size that they are the t trees in the churchyard. Catshill Church is where

BOYHOOD

A.E.H. was baptized, on Easter Sunday, 24th April 1859, and here, in his Oxford days, he occasionally read the lessons on Sundays when our father, who usually read them, was absent. It was our custom to walk to church twice on Sundays, summer and winter, though it was a mile or so from Fockbury.

Our move to Fockbury House was not altogether one of ease and comfort. The house had no gas, no water taps, no drainage, and it was far from the School, town, and our father's office; but it was a good place for children. It had originally been the home farm of the estate, and in addition to its own large garden and its orchard we had the range of farm buildings with rick-yards, barns, lofts, and cart-sheds. Near us, besides woods and lanes, fields, pools and brooks, were friendly farms dotted about the neighbourhood, part of our grandmother's property, affording us truly exciting playing places. The very pretty streams of this brook-girt land are all tributaries of the river Severn.

The whole of this countryside delighted A.E.H. When first we moved to Fockbury he made walking for the love of it his chief recreation. Our father was a man of many hobbies—too many—shooting, fishing, music, photography, firework-making, besides his chief interest, horticulture. All of us but Alfred took some part, eventually, in these occupations, but he was quite content to fill his spare time with reading and walking. One of his pleasures was to reach some point where he could see extensive views. There was one hill quite close to The Clock House, in a field at the top of Worms Ash Lane, that gave him this

BOYHOOD

with little trouble. We called the place "Mount Pisgah," and it is surely the spot which A.E.H. must have had in mind when he wrote the Jubilee poem that opens *A Shropshire Lad*. It was there he would go to gaze on the sunset lands of Shropshire; and on Jubilee night, 1887, a party of us walked there from Bromsgrove to see the bonfires lighted—Mr. and Mrs. Millington* and some of the masters and boys of the School joining us. We saw the bonfires burning right round the counties from the Malvern Hills to the Wrekin, and farther. A.E.H. himself describes, exactly, his visits to "Mount Pisgah" in *Last Poems*, No. 39, though, poetically, he calls the place a "beacon"—which it is not. He wrote the poem after the age of 60:—

When summer's end is nighing
And skies at evening cloud,
I muse on change and fortune
And all the feats I vowed
When I was young and proud.

The weathercock at sunset
Would lose the slanted ray,
And I would climb the beacon
That looked to Wales away
And saw the last of day.

And I with earth and nightfall
In converse high would stand,
Late, till the west was ashen
And darkness hard at hand,
And the eye lost the land.

* Mr. Millington was the Headmaster of the School.

BOYHOOD

The year might age, and cloudy
The lessening day might close,
But air of other summers
Breathed from beyond the snows,
And I had hope of those.

They came and were and are not
And come no more anew;
And all the years and seasons
That ever can ensue
Must now be worse and few.

So here's an end of roaming
On eves when autumn nighs:
The ear too fondly listens
For summer's parting sighs,
And then the heart replies.

There, we have A.E.H. writing of his own boyhood in old age; and earlier in life, when in London, he wrote of it too. It was of Fockbury, then, and for ever, that No. 52 in *A Shropshire Lad* was written:—

Far in a western brookland
That bred me long ago
The poplars stand and tremble
By pools I used to know.

There, in the windless night-time,
The wanderer, marvelling why,
Halts on the bridge to harken
How soft the poplars sigh.

He hears: no more remembered
In fields where I was known,
Here I lie down in London
And turn to rest alone.

BOYHOOD

There, by the starlit fences,
The wanderer halts and hears
My soul that lingers sighing
About the glimmering weirs.

Alfred's boyish attachment to Fockbury is shown by a touching little incident that he relates in one of his early letters. In January 1875 he boarded at the School for a time while scarlet fever ran through our household. Till then, we had not known that Fockbury was on the northern horizon from Bromsgrove, but he found that he could see the house and trees plainly from the churchyard, and he wrote of spending an hour there looking on his home.

In April of the same year, he wrote to his step-mother, then in London, a letter entirely in rhyme to tell her of home doings. The versification is not remarkable, but a whole page is given to the garden cries of birds—interesting in evidence of his constant observation of wild things. According to him, this was their “feathered conversation”:—

“Look here! look here!” one of them cries,
“Peter” another one replies
(Perhaps a Roman Catholic bird),
And scarcely has he said this word
When one of more ferocious mind
Screams out in fury “Whip behind!”
An scarcely has his clamour ceased
When shrieks arise of “You’re a beast!”
Another, rest one moment brings,
Saying in French pacific things.
Then one (piano) “Pretty Dick!”
One more (crescendo) “Quick! quick! quick!”
(Forte) “Look here! look here!” once more,
And so da capo, as before.

BOYHOOD

Alfred by this time had come into our lives as a companion who endeared himself to every one of us. We had been gradually drawn together out of nursery and school-room by our step-mother, a cousin whom our father married in 1873—a cultured woman to whom we all owed much. Alfred gave her solid support in her difficult task of mothering the family of seven, grateful affection subsisting between them. In term-time we still saw little of him. He dined late with the elders of the family and worked alone. School hours were severe. In the summer, morning school began at 7 a.m., and afternoon school, on whole school days, was from 4 to 6 p.m. The brothers, first Alfred alone, and then, in turn, others of them, rose early for a 6 o'clock breakfast; and their late return left room for little but home work before bed-time. Only on half-holidays could we all meet for the customary hour in the drawing room with our step-mother, when Alfred would join us in cards, games, and glee-singing. But in the holidays, when our governess left us our schoolroom to ourselves, he took a different place, coming among us as a welcomed and beloved leader.

Of the seven of us, the two next to Robert were sisters, making a gap between the elder and younger brothers. In size and worth we seemed to alternate. My elder sister Clemence at the age of 13 overtopped backward Robert in stature and learning. Her abilities probably equalled Alfred's, and in later years Mr. Millington used to say that he wished he had her in his Sixth Form. I was small, and a dunce through my inveterate hatred of lessons. Basil, who came next, followed Alfred in orderly studiousness,

BOYHOOD

but, with prosaic and mechanical tastes, he went a different way. Laurence and Herbert had to grow before they counted much—Herbert long remaining a small pet brother. He was three years younger than Laurence and nearly ten younger than Alfred.

The schoolroom at Fockbury in the holidays became the frequent scene of occupations of A.E.H.'s devising, mostly with some element of co-operation or competition in them. Drawing, painting, picture-making had their part, but plays and active games had a share, and above all he set us to work writing. We had to write "poems"; we had to write stories; and towards the end of his school days we had to contribute to a Family Magazine, that he wrote out himself in his small neat writing for annual circulation among relations and friends. We found great fun in all this, for Alfred had a way of making things he did amusing as well as interesting. Our gatherings were generally hilarious; yet in looking back, it is in these doings that we can now see that he had an emotional nature, subject to gloom that spread in spite of his efforts to subdue it.

A.E.H. was about 13 when he first decreed that we should write composite poems on subjects set by him, each of us writing one verse. The first subject given out was Death! Even seven-year-old Laurence was made to take part, and I believe the verse that was his displayed signs of his future literary agility by making *reverence* rhyme with *ever hence*. As this may have been Laurence Housman's very first verse-writing, the four lines may be given in full:—

BOYHOOD

Death is a dreadful thought,
And every person ought
To think of it with reverence
Before they go for ever hence.

Alfred did not take part in the Death-poem himself; and I am sorry to say that our joint effort on this serious subject was greeted with roars of laughter from him and our elders. "Spring Flowers" was the next subject set; but soon afterwards we were promoted to the writing of sonnets! or whole poems, on subjects chosen by him. He would tutor our pens as rhymesters with care and perhaps guile, for now we suspect that his compositions were already written when he set the themes that gave opportunity for their production. I still retain the impression of tremendous grandeur compared with our jingle made on me as a child by his sonorous out-pourings:—

The thin blue clouds that pall the dying day
Have drawn across the sunken sun their veil;

came to me like a revelation as a description of "Sunset." The mortal touch, when he introduced it, always thrilled me. I do not know why, but I can understand its attraction for him.

Strangely enough, his first printed verse, written at the age of 15, had death for its subject—not by his choosing. When head of the Fourth Form, in 1874, he took the prize for English Verse with a composition 106 lines long on *The Death of Socrates*. I cannot call his production poetry, but he read part of it on Commemoration Speech Day 1874, and it was printed in *The Bromsgrove Messenger*,



A. E. HOUSMAN AT SCHOOL, 1877

BOYHOOD

August 3, 1874. It is a fair specimen of facile rhyming for a boy of his age, but the immaturity of composition that runs through it can be shown by four lines:—

Best of all Grecians, seeking to explore
The realms that never had been searched before,
From which the bravest shrank with bated breath,
The great unknown that follows after death.

The final lines of this set of verses—"And on the hill thy feet so oft have trod, he shall in fulness preach thine Unknown God"—referred to St. Paul, and presumably suggested the subject set for the next year's verse—*St. Paul on Mars' Hill*—which A.E.H. won from the Fifth Form.

Better poetry than this is found in verses that A.E.H. produced at home about this time. This is a good specimen:—

SUMMER

Summer! and over brooding lands
The noonday haze of heat expands.
A gentle breeze along the meadows
Lifts a few leaflets on the trees;
But cannot stir the clouds that lie
Motionless on the dreaming sky,
And cannot stir the sleeping shadows
As motionless upon the leas.

Summer! and after Summer what?
Ah! happy trees that know it not,
Would that with us it might be so.
And yet, the broad-flung beechtree heaves
Through all its slanting layers of leaves
With something like a sigh. Ah no!
'Tis but the wind that with its breath

BOYHOOD

To them so softly murmureth;
For them hath still new sweets in store
And sings new music evermore;
Only to us its tones seem sighs,
Only to us it prophesies
Of coming Autumn, coming death.

Another example of his early verse comes from the only fragment that is left of the Family Magazine that A.E.H. edited and transcribed. It is a little poem written for my sister. We were to write a play in blank verse on the Execution of Lady Jane Grey, each writing one of the scenes. My sister's scene was the night before the execution, and she asked Alfred to write a song that she could make Lady Jane sing to her lute for the last time. He wrote a song that will be printed in full elsewhere, but these are its opening lines:—

Breathe my lute beneath my fingers
One regretful breath,
One lament for life that lingers
Round the doors of death.

This number of the Magazine was never finished; Alfred left for Oxford before he had written it out.

A specimen of his verse that I should like to give as an early example of death persistent in his thoughts, was not written while he was at school, but it was written before *A Shropshire Lad* had exposed the bent of his thoughts towards the grave. It is not unsuitable for the youth of Bromsgrove School to take as addressed to them by one of themselves who became a Sage before his life ended.

BOYHOOD

Likely enough it commemorates the battles of his own adolescence. A.E.H. omitted it from the poems of *A Shropshire Lad* because it did not conform to the tone of that collection; but it is to be found at full length in *More Poems*:—

THE SAGE TO THE YOUNG MAN

O youth whose heart is right,
Whose loins are girt to gain
The hell-defended height
Where virtue beckons plain;

Who seest the stark array,
And hast not stayed to count
But singly wilt assay
The many-cannoned mount;

Well is thy war begun;
Endure be strong and strive;
But think not, O my son,
To save thy soul alive.

Wilt thou be true and just
And clean and kind and brave?
Well; but for all thou dost,
Be sure it shall not save.

Thou, when the night falls deep,
Thou, though the mount be won,
High heart, thou shalt but sleep
The sleep denied to none.

How shouldst thou keep the prize?
Thou wast not born for aye.

BOYHOOD

Content thee if thine eyes
Behold it in thy day.

O Youth that wilt attain,
On, for thine hour is short.
It may be thou shalt gain
The hell-defended fort.

These examples of his verse must not make it appear that a gloomy cast of thought was habitual to A.E.H. in boyhood. They stand out because of their relation to the trend shown in later emotional verse, a trend that he was as ready to deplore as the most severe of his critics. To a hope that he would write more poems, he once replied that, as he seemed unable to write about anything but death and the grave, he thought he had better not.

In personal appearance A.E.H. as a boy was not gloomy either; he had a pleasant, open countenance, as is seen in a photograph taken of him shortly before he left school. His nose at that time had not taken the aquiline curve that was afterwards suitable to one who would swoop on literate or illiterate persons and rend them.

The lighter side of Alfred's poetic fancies flew to comical rhymes frankly devoid of literary pretention, spontaneous and unpolished. Outrageous rhyming was a feature in many of them, and added amusement. His own wish prevents the collection of these entertaining fragments which would do so much to counteract the impression of morbidity spread by the Tragic Muse over his serious poetry, but some recollection of them can be rightfully allowed. His nonsense prose, as well, could be de-

BOYHOOD

lightful; but no publication of that is to be permitted to come into contrast with his scholarly writings. My business, however, is less with productions that have brought him fame than with these suppressed trivialities. It may be unfair to the scholar to perpetuate such careless productions, but how else can I show the brother-that-might-have-been if learning had let him alone? He was quick to see humour in things about him, or to give grim things a humorous turn. It is a side of him unshown by his poetry or by his learned writings.

The Bromsgrovian is fortunate in having already published a comical skit called "A Morning with the Royal Family," written by A.E.H. at home for a symposium of Christmas stories, and nefariously passed on to *The Bromsgrovian* years afterwards by Basil when he was on the original *Bromsgrovian* Committee. It appeared in Vol. 1, Nos. 2 and 3, in the year 1882. With bated breath, may the first lines be given:—"Pigs on the front lawn again!" said the King, "give me a cannon somebody!" No one gave him a cannon, so, seizing a teaspoon from the breakfast table, he . . .

The parody "A Fragment of a Greek Tragedy," that has gained wide publication—even reaching an Anthology of Parodies—was first printed in *The Bromsgrovian*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 1883, above the initials "A.E.H." It appears to be a piece of humorous writing that A.E.H. did not wish to suppress. At the Fourth of June Eton Speeches in 1936 it was chosen for declamation, and laughter is long likely to echo from it. The opening lines of the ver-

BOYHOOD

sion in circulation do not agree with the original, which, therefore, for purposes of comparison, may be given here:—

ALCMAEON: CHORUS.

Cho. O gracefully-enveloped-in-a-cloak
Head of a stranger, wherefore, seeking what,
Whence, by what way, how purposed are you come
To this well-nightingaled vicinity?
My cause of asking is, I wish to know,
But if perchance, from being deaf and dumb,
You cannot understand a word I say,
Then wave your hand, to signify as much.

Alc. I journeyed hither on Ambracian road.

Cho. Sailing on horseback, or with feet for oars?

Alc. Plying with speed my partnership of knees.

Cho. Beneath a shining or a rainy Zeus?

Alc. Mud's sister, not himself, adorns my legs.

From boyhood, A.E.H. was accustomed to scribble frivolous writings in rhyme about passing events. Deserving or not, a number of these have been preserved. One that I recently came across refers to the Spelling Bees of his youth, then popular as a way of raising charitable funds. His faultless spelling made him a successful competitor at these, and he used to write from an inkstand won on an occasion when I remember the word which finally vanquished his adult opponents was *camelopard*. The scrap that I have must have been written at this time:—

Of old the little Busy Bee
Improved the shining hour,
And gathered honey all the day
From every opening flower.

BOYHOOD

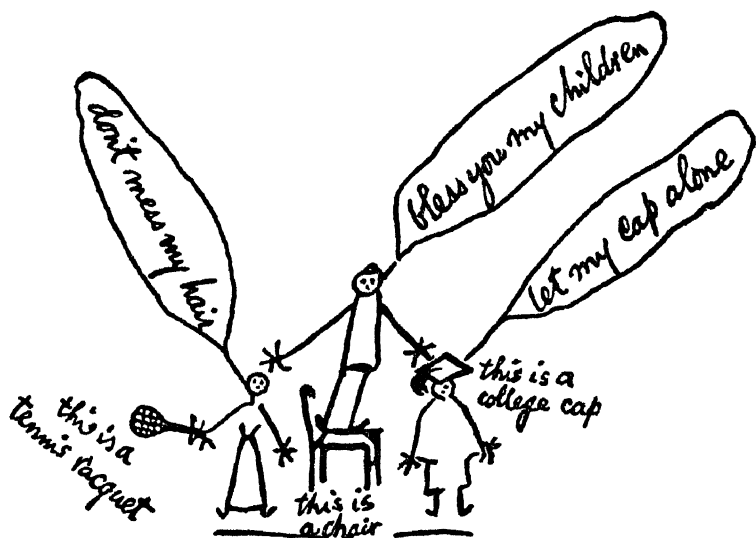
But now the little Spelling Bee
Has new ideas quite,
And gets, not honey in the day,
But money in the night.

Long after boyhood he would add nonsense verses to his letters, professing that he had composed them while shaving. Sometimes he would make comical sketches. One of these is of himself standing on a chair, with me and E. W. Symons (then second master of Bromsgrove School) receiving his blessing on the occasion of our engagement. This was in 1887. After the coming of young nephews, his inclination to write nonsense rhymes seemed to revive—with pungency and dryness of humour increased. A typical one for a Child's Book of Bad Beasts, was accompanied by a sketch of a big bear and an empty perambulator. It was entitled "The Bear and the Infant Child, or The Pathos of Ignorance."

A bear untamable and wild
Has just devoured an infant child.
The infant child is not aware
It has been eaten by the bear.

The foregoing verse has circulated in several versions; so has the following one, which in my version was entitled "The Elephant, or The Force of Habit."

A tail behind, a trunk in front,
Completes the usual elephant.
An elephant with trunk behind,
Is much more difficult to find;
And if throughout the world you hunt



SKETCH ADDED TO LETTER OF CONGRATULATION

Amelia mixed the mustard,
 She mixed it good and thick;
 She put it in the custard
 And made her mother sick;
 And showing satisfaction
 By many a loud huzza
 'Observe' said she 'the action
 Of mustard on mamma.'

CONTRIBUTION TO "RUTHLESS RHYMES" BY A.E.H.

ADDED AT THE END OF A LETTER

BOYHOOD

To find one with the tail in front,
I fear the search will take you long,
The force of habit is so strong.

A considerable number of long and elaborate nonsense-poems written after boyhood exist, but none can be given here.

His earlier contributions to our paper games at home were always clever and amusing. Here is one for "Nouns and Questions," bringing the word *Cucumber* into the answer of the question—Have oysters whiskers as well as beards?

The oyster is found in the ocean
And cucumbers grow on the land;
And the oyster is slightly the moister,
As most people well understand.

And the reason I mentioned this fact was
That oyster and moister will rhyme;
And *cucumber*, that word exact was
The noun to be brought in this time.

And therefore with joy the most boister'us
I conclude with the prudent remark,
That as to the whiskers of oysters
I am totally all in the dark.

His spirit of fun made some of his rhymes run to pure nonsense—such as this:—

Oft when the night is chilly
And creation is ill at ease,
The piano twangles shrilly
As the cat walks over the keys.

BOYHOOD

And I lie on my bed complaining,
 "There is nothing at all in that,
'Twould be far more entertaining
 If the keys walked over the cat."

Oft when the night is murky
 I lie on my bed and snore,
And the Sultan exclaims in Turkey,
 "They are taking in coals next door!"
But they say, "May your shadow be glorious,
 O Commander of faithful souls!
'Tis that poet of Queen Victoria's.
 He is snoring—not taking in coals."

These specimens of the underlying humour that my brother possessed, display the kindly spirit that inclined him from boyhood even to the end of his life to amuse others as well as himself by such laughable trivialities. He left many humorous fragments among his MS. papers which had to be destroyed after his death; but, fortunately, it is not necessary to suppress all knowledge of this humorous tendency that was, perhaps, happier and more spontaneous than any other to which he gave play. A cartoon of him that appeared in *Punch* in 1922, would serve as an apt illustration of him in his spirit of comedy.

At Fockbury we saw a great deal more of this side of him than of the troubled depths that he kept to himself. But then we were not looking for any depths, and did not criticise him when his behaviour was occasionally a little eccentric. I do not remember ever seeing him angry—though scornful, often. Once I saw an irritated younger brother smack his cheek; his reply was to assume an air

BOYHOOD

of exaggerated superiority and turn his face for another smack. My brother Laurence says that when a second smack came, Alfred fell on the offender and chastised him; but I do not remember it.

Our joyful following of Alfred never led us into disgrace. He was not naturally pugnacious like his brothers, nor ever unpunctual, grubby, or disobedient as the rest of us could be. Habits practised by him in those years never left him. Punctuality, industry, fixed routine, daily walking, love of flowers and trees, woods and hills, all were part of his Fockbury life. The shallow sponge bath of his boyhood remained his preference through life. His proclaimed liking for beer followed his customary drinking of beer as a boy. He drank beer daily from his silver christening mug; we all drank beer from our own mugs; the servants drank beer; and so did the boarders at the School.

The little eccentric habits that he had, and occasional moodiness, we were accustomed to. Many things he did with an inner intensity that was obvious. You could see his feelings in his face as he drew or painted. When lost in thought he would contort his features, or become oblivious to what was going on around him. His sense of some pleasures was acute, and seemed exercised best alone. It was alone that he liked to tramp to enjoy the sight and smell of woodlands, or to gaze on a setting sun or a starry sky. He absorbed the look and scent of flowers with a vivid perception that visibly moved him. Maybe it was this sense that afterwards made him a connoisseur of wines. Throughout life, I think the intensity of his feelings made

BOYHOOD

him intolerant. Because he felt intensely he was sure he was right—and did not scruple to assert his opinion.

Towards the end of his school days we became concerned by a growing taciturnity in him which increased when he went to Oxford and spoilt all our happy fellowship. This coincided with an increasing restriction of means which fell on our household as we grew up. Probably A.E.H. knew more than we did of impending troubles; and dread of the future, with foresight of coming inhibitions on the free expansion of his inclinations, may have produced the change. Certainly his path to easy happiness became blocked, and though this may have helped him to pass through Oxford, as he did, without debts or follies, it was enough to cloud his life. For the rest of us, the troubles that came compelled us to leave Fockbury and return to Perry Hall; but we remained quite happy in our crippled circumstances.

A.E.H.'s Oxford career ended with a numbing blow when through neglect of a repugnant but necessary course of study he was ploughed in Classical Greats. His own fault; but that did not make less bitter the wreck of his hopes and the ruin of his prospects. The painful course that his life took for ten years while he repaired this injury, permanently influenced his attitude towards the outside world. Wounded pride set him a purpose, but for a time he was stranded, with his Scholarship ended, and his allowance from a disappointed relative taken away. By the kindness of Mr. Millington at the beginning of this time he was given temporary work with the Sixth Form. This work was mentioned by him and perhaps helped him

BOYHOOD

when, ten years later, he successfully applied for the vacant Chair of Latin at University College, London. When he gained that honourable post in 1892 he was a man without a University degree; subsequently he declined all higher degrees than the B.A. and M.A. that he then took.

Glimpses of the heart-sickness suffered by A.E.H. in London when he went there to live in 1882, are found in his poems. The whole of *A Shropshire Lad* was written while he was there. In some of the poems, more directly than in "Far in a western brookland," he throws off the figment of a Shropshire lad, and refers unmistakably to his own home and boyhood. In No. 41, "In my own shire if I was sad" he makes comparison:—

Yonder, lightening other loads,
The seasons range the country roads,
But here in London streets I ken
No such helpmates, only men;
And these are not in plight to bear
If they would, another's care.

The same idea is with him as he tells in No. 51 his thoughts as he meets the gaze of a Greek statue:—

'Well met,' I thought the look would say,
'We both were fashioned far away;
We neither knew, when we were young,
These Londoners we live among.'

Poem No. 40, more than any other, sums up briefly his pangs of remembrance:—

Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:

BOYHOOD

What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?

That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.

One of these poems, No. 33, tells of another heart-sickness; and this is retold, in a fragment given posthumous publication in *More Poems* No. 12:—

But this unlucky love should last
When answered passions thin to air;
Eternal fate so deep has cast
Its sure foundations of despair.

It cannot be doubted that when his return to the scholastic world came, A.E.H. found bachelorhood and, later on, his Cambridge Fellowship necessary for the efficient pursuit of his work—the relatively cloistered seclusion that he adopted following from causes found in his boyhood.

Through all this there was no break in his home ties. Correspondence was constant; the home in trouble was not deserted, rather, he sacrificed himself for it. In the year after his Oxford disaster, the death of our paternal grandmother brought us all, through the bequest of an uncle previously deceased, a small portion of the considerable patrimony that once was hers. His share A.E.H. never touched, but devoted it to helping the home that was in sore need. Generous actions like this came again and again in his life, showing to those who knew him best a different man to the self-absorbed, self-contained personality that he

BOYHOOD

chose to present to the world—and that most of those who have written about him present also to the world. Consideration for the feelings of people comfortably off he certainly had not; but, to a painful degree, he was capable of compassion for suffering, and resentment against the cruelties of the world.

A.E.H.'s serious poetry is evidence of a second man within the rigidly disciplined scholar. It pours from a fount that his discipline was apparently unable to control. We read in it deep-seated emotions demanding expression—the frequent repetition of a few themes showing the permanence of a source that refused to be suppressed. Some of it comes to us as the expression of philosophical agonies that drove him into sympathy with murderers and suicides; some of it sounds like the knell of painful explorations in the wake of Socrates. Poetry seems to have acted as safety valve to his mental sufferings. An unpublished poem discloses his own view of the causes of his inner disquiet; in four lines he gives his own biography:—

The stars have not dealt me the worst they could do;
My pleasures are plenty, my troubles are two.
But oh, my two troubles they reave me of rest,
The brains in my head and the heart in my breast.

It is a mistake to try to identify A.E.H. personally with his phantom lads of Shropshire. He followed them into their own shire, and they made him love it; but where his poems can be identified with himself they are quite foreign to the Shropshire series, and apply to a Worcestershire lad yearning for the countryside of Bromsgrove.

BOYHOOD

Many of his poems show his own fascination for the subject of death—whether of attraction or repulsion it is hard to say—and they show, also, his attraction towards soldiers, two sentiments strong in him from boyhood. On his intellectual side, we allow him to have been intolerant; on his human side, he was ready to humble himself before the man who chose to go out to fight and risk his life in doing so. It is a true story that is told of his sending all his available money to the Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1914, because he could give no other war-service. He first sent £100 to help in equipping three nephews who had joined the Army, and all the rest of his bank balance he sent to the Exchequer.

One of *Last Poems*, No. 32, may literally apply to himself from its opening, "When I would muse in boyhood," to its termination:—

They sought and found six feet of ground,
And there they died for me.

The soldier attraction was genuine admiration, not morbid. In 1874 he paid his first visit to London, and a letter written by him with a long description of the things that had interested him concludes with the statement that what had impressed him most of all was the Life Guards! "This may be barbarian," he adds, "but it is true."

The soldiers found in his poems are not all phantoms of his imagination. Many of his poems in *A Shropshire Lad* and *Last Poems* have a very certain connection with the history of our brother Herbert, for whom A.E.H. bore strong affection. Herbert was the only one of the five

BOYHOOD

brothers without studious inclinations. He gained cups at school instead of prizes, and was more popular with the boys than with the masters. He left the School to become a medical student, but drawn towards a more active life he took his career into his own hands as soon as he came of age, and 'listed for a soldier. Already a fine shot in the Bromsgrove Rifle Corps, he chose to throw in his lot with the King's Royal Rifles, gaining non-commissioned rank almost immediately after recruitment. Eleven years later, in 1901, he lost his life in a gallant charge of Mounted Infantry for the rescue of Col. Benson's guns from the Boers. Those who knew, could read this young brother into many of the soldiering verses that A.E.H. wrote—though not into all. The allusions are strongest in *Last Poems*, which appeared after Herbert was killed. No. 17 of *Last Poems*, entitled "Astronomy," becomes fully intelligible only when it is understood that it was this brother who exchanged the Pole Star for Southern Cross and returned no more. No lines written by A.E.H. have more personal application than these:—

Oh I will sit me down and weep
For bones in Africa.

I imagine intention in the placing of poem No. 18 next to that one. Though it has not a soldier garb, the battle-field death and burial of his brother in 1901 cannot have been out of Alfred's mind as he wrote this poem in 1902. The news received of Herbert's death told of the soldiers who fell lying all night in pouring rain before a party could be sent to bury them. They had been stripped of their

BOYHOOD

outer clothing by the Boers. The poem has a pathetic suggestion that it was cast in remembrance of this burial, and of this brother. The first and last stanzas of the poem were written in 1902, with three verses interpolated later:—

The rain it streams on stone and hillock,
The boot clings to the clay.
Since all is done that's due and right
Let's home; and now, my lad, good-night,
For I must turn away.

Good-night, my lad, for nought's eternal;
No league of ours, for sure.
To-morrow I shall miss you less,
And ache of heart and heaviness
Are things that time should cure.

But oh, my man, the house is fallen
That none can build again;
My man, how full of joy and woe
Your mother bore you years ago
To-night to lie in the rain.

More direct reference to his brother was found in A.E.H.'s unpublished poems when he died: No. 40 in *More Poems* must refer to him:—

Farewell to a name and a number,
Recalled again
To darkness and silence and slumber
In blood and pain.

So ceases and turns to the thing
He was born to be
A soldier cheap to the King
And dear to me.



SERGEANT GEORGE HERBERT HOUSMAN

BOYHOOD

The "name and number" of our brother was—Sergeant George Herbert Housman, 6365, K. R. Rifles, 25th Battⁿ. Mounted Infantry, S. A. Field Force.

Poem No. 4, "Illic Jacet," in *Last Poems* applies to this grave on the Veldt, though it appears to have been written earlier in the Boer War than 1901. Alfred sent "Illic Jacet" to me when one of my sons was killed in Flanders in 1915. He said that he had written it some years earlier, but he sent it to me because "it is the function of poetry to harmonise the sadness of the world."

Does not that give a key to much of his poetry?

If the poems of A.E.H. published posthumously seem to tell of a life ending in increasing gloom, it would be well to look on them as what they are—outpourings that he had thrust from him and put aside. Actually, in his last years, he opened out some of his gloomy corners, and became more ready to display to those who looked for it the heart that he had chosen to close from view.

It is not my part to wander far from recollections of A.E.H., the boy; and if I have gone farther, it is because of the relation that the later events of his life bore to those of his boyhood. I can only hope that all I have written may help towards a better understanding of A.E.H., the man.

Outside the northern wall of the nave of Ludlow Parish Church, the ashes of A.E.H. lie buried in Worcestershire soil—mould gathered from under the trees of Perry Hall and The Clock House, Fockbury. Words that he addressed to one of his Shropshire lads we can use for his own epitaph as his dust lies there:—

BOYHOOD

Leave your home behind you,
Your friends by field and town;
Oh town and field will mind you
Till Ludlow tower is down.

KATHARINE E. SYMONS.

SOME REMINISCENCES

ALFRED HOUSMAN and I won open scholarships together at St. John Baptist's College, Oxford, at Midsummer 1877, and started residence on the same "stair" in the second quad the following October. Most of the scholarships at St. John's are appropriated to Merchants Taylor's School and their holders come up with friendships ready made; thus Housman and I from the first were thrown much together. My own success had been mainly in the essay paper; his was won on purely classical work and after a time, on the advice, I think, of Robinson Ellis, the editor of Catullus, he went for coaching to T. H. Warren, Fellow and Tutor, and subsequently President of Magdalen, in the hope of doing well for the Hertford, the University classical scholarship for men in their first or second year. The special gifts which subsequently made him such a fine textual critic did not help him for this, but I believe he was among the first five or six. His favourite English poet in these early days was Matthew Arnold, whose "Empedocles on Etna" he recommended to me as containing "all the law and the

SOME REMINISCENCES

prophets." Among novelists his favourite was Thomas Hardy, and I think Hardy's influence went far deeper than Arnold's; but he read also Henry James, though with some affliction at his prolixity. After we had sat for classical Mods, in May 1879, he stayed with me for the inside of a week in London and on four successive evenings we went together to see Irving and Ellen Terry in revivals of plays they had performed during the season. I think Housman was the most absorbed member of the audience.

Up to this time all had gone well with Housman at Oxford and I think he was quietly happy and was generally recognized in the College as exceptionally able. When he was in the mood he could recite to very restricted audiences humorous stories of his own making, which were made double humorous by his prim method of telling them. We had from the first taken many walks together and continued to do so in our third year, and began also to play elementary lawn tennis together in the College garden; otherwise I saw rather less of him as I had moved into the other quad. In our fourth year, however, when we had to go out of College, he and I and Moses Jackson, a delightful science scholar, took five rooms together in a picturesque old house in St. Giles', nearly opposite the College, now long ago displaced by academic buildings. After we had returned from dining in Hall, and had our coffee (neither Housman nor Jackson smoked), I mostly retired to work by myself in the lower sitting room, leaving the other two on the first floor. Jackson's was an absolutely safe first in science in the schools and had no need to read much in the evening. What and how much Housman read I don't

SOME REMINISCENCES

know, but I was aware that he was working at Propertius as a recreation; also that he enjoyed W. H. Mallock's *Is Life Worth Living*, and I think found this useful in writing his weekly essays for one of the College lecturers, to whom they were so diverting that he does not seem to have questioned the adequacy of the knowledge on which they were based. In either the Lent or the summer term of 1880, we had the College examination known as "collections" and it may have been then that the Senior Tutor began to suspect that Housman was not putting his back into his work for Greats, for at a lecture he made a harmless remark of Housman the occasion for informing him before us all that he was *not* a genius!

Like the College lecturer, I was so impressed with Housman's ability that I took it for granted that he would do well in Greats, though he was obviously not specially interested in parts of the work. When, however, some weeks after the written examinations, I went up to Oxford for my *viva*, the bewilderment of the examiners at finding themselves compelled, as they considered, to refuse even a pass to a man who had obtained a first in Mods, had caused enquiries to be made, which were now passed on to me, as to how it had come about that on some of the papers Housman had hardly attempted to offer any answers. What had he been doing? The only explanation I could offer at the time was that I believed he might have occupied himself too much with the text of Propertius, and that remained the only explanation I could offer to myself or to anyone else, until in the emotion caused by the news of his death I realized that for a man who was, if not already

SOME REMINISCENCES

a great scholar, at least a great scholar in the making, it was psychologically impossible to make the best of his knowledge on subjects in which he had lost interest.

It was necessary for Housman to get a degree to enable him to earn a living, so he took his Pass B.A. not without a mishap in one subject (I think political economy), and then after a temporary job as a schoolmaster, entered the Government Patent Office in 1882 as a Higher Division Clerk under the Playfair scheme, i.e., at a salary of £100 a year rising by triennial increments of £37 10s. to £400, as payment for a six hour day. This left him plenty of time for his own work, and if he had chosen he might easily have earned a supplementary income, either by his vein of extravagant humour or by elementary classical work. I doubt if he ever made the smallest effort to earn a penny in either way, but he soon became a frequent contributor of notes, chiefly emendations of corruptions in the texts of Horace Propertius and the Greek tragedians, in the classical reviews. Fortunately Jackson had entered the Patent Office about the same time (in a better paid section, thanks to his science degree), and he and Housman lived together in rooms at Bayswater. I occasionally saw them, but I got it into my head that the sight of me reminded Housman of his troubles and was unwilling to thrust myself on him more than he might welcome. When, however, in 1890 I got together, for my bookseller-publisher, David Stott of Oxford Street, a selection of *Odes from Greek Dramatists*, with verse translations by English scholars, Housman came to my help with three renderings, from the *Septem Contra Thebas* (1848-60), *Oedipus*

SOME REMINISCENCES

Coloneus (1611-48), and *Alcestis* (962-1005), which should not be overlooked by his bibliographers. On two occasions he gave me the pleasure of helping him. The first time (1892), I did so with great diffidence, for what he asked was a testimonial from me in support of his application for the Professorship of Latin at University College, London, and I thought that I was much too inconspicuous for anything I could write to carry weight. However, he explained that he had influential backing as regards his competence as a Latin scholar, and all he wanted was a few words as to his power of expressing himself in English, and my various editings were enough to entitle me to testify to this; so I did as I was told. The second occasion came four years later, when *A Shropshire Lad*, under the name of *Terence*,* was ready for publication. Housman knew that books of mine had been published by Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., who had gained rather a special reputation for bringing out prettily printed volumes of verse, and asked me to arrange with them for its publication at his expense. Of course there was no difficulty as to this (I think Housman put down £30 and got it back with a small profit), but my being entrusted with the manuscript led me to suggest that *Terence* was not an attractive title, and that in the phrase "A Shropshire Lad," which he had used in the poem, he had much a better one. He agreed at once, and I think the change helped.

After 1899, when I moved from Kensington to Wimble-

* This is all I remember of the title, but I am told that in its fullest form it was *The Poems of Terence Hearsay*.

SOME REMINISCENCES

don, I saw still less of Housman, though we occasionally corresponded and there was a jolly interlude when Jackson, who had left the Patent Office for the Headship of a native college in India, was home on leave, and he and Housman dined and slept in my house. When I retired to rest I found an apple-pie bed awaiting me and I think the Professor of Latin was a fellow victim, though I'm not quite sure that he wasn't an aggressor. Anyhow, we became very youthful and light-hearted. In 1911 I went up to Cambridge to hear his inaugural lecture in his second Professorship and was richly rewarded by the cry of pleasure with which I was greeted when he caught sight of me after it. I think that somehow my presence seemed to him a recognition that he had reached his haven at last. His final assurance as to this came when he was made an Honorary Fellow of his own Oxford College, and on going up to stay there received a great welcome, his genial response to which is still remembered. The last time I myself saw him was in 1934, when Cambridge honoured me with its Litt. D. on the occasion of the opening of the new University Library. There was a festive lunch at Kings, at which Housman was present, and in the course of it he came up to greet me with a pretty speech. He was already looking thin and tired, and I was not surprised to hear soon afterwards of the beginning of his illness. We did not see much of each other in these last years, but our friendship was undiminished. I owe him many and great debts, and am very grateful for being given this opportunity to acknowledge them.

A. W. POLLARD.

“SHROPSHIRE LAD” YEAR— AND AFTER

WHEN I am told that the author of *A Shropshire Lad* was of more pre-eminent rank as a scholar than as a poet, the information—though I have no doubt that it is true—leaves me unmoved in my own personal devotion. Exact scholarship is a rare and a high virtue; but to me it is a cold one; while the writing of even a single good poem secures for its author not merely my respect but my warm gratitude. And truly the day when I first opened *A Shropshire Lad* and found there more than thirty very good poems awaiting me, was one of the great events of my life.

My brother had kept it a sealed secret from his family until the day of publication; and though I had, by a chance indiscretion, got wind of it from the publisher who was also my publisher, its quality came on me like thunder out of a clear sky. Before the end of the day I knew a dozen of the poems by heart, and before the end of the week nearly all of them; and my legs being then young, capable of keeping pace with the enthusiasm of my tongue, I ran

“SHROPSHIRE LAD” YEAR—AND AFTER

round among my friends reciting those which were already my favourites, and always, I think—for my friends were of my own generation and literary in their tastes—with acceptance. One friend, to whose household I had sent a copy of the poems, flung open her window to a London street as she saw me coming to the door a week later, and cried rapturously: “Oh, L.H., what beautiful poems your brother has written!”

But the elder generation did not give them the same welcome. “H.M.,” of Bromsgrove School, to whom, I think, Alfred had sent a presentation copy, said that the poems were “not good.” A few years ago, when I quoted this to my brother, he said, “Well, of course, the only poetry that Millington was able to admire was Tennyson’s.” But even a College friend, to whom he had submitted the poems for criticism before publication, regarded as a fond extravagance my declaration that they were better than Stevenson’s “Underwoods”—R.L.S. being then very much more the fashion than he is now. Mr. Edmund Gosse, who had a weakness for depreciating any literary discoveries but his own, said sneeringly to a brother-critic, “Who is this house-boat person they are all chattering about?” A week later, afraid of being left behind, he was chattering himself in three whole columns.

But though the literary world had become aware, within the first month, that a new poet had arisen, only three hundred and eighty-one copies of the book had been sold, at half-a-crown each, at the end of the year; and about two years later, finding that six copies of the first edition still remained unsold, I bought the lot, gave some away, and

“SHROPSHIRE LAD” YEAR—AND AFTER

then thirty years later, after telling my brother that I was going to have a ramp with the second-hand book-market, I contrived to sell one copy for £12, the next for £20, the next for £30, and the last, which Alfred obligingly signed for me to make it unique, for £70. It sold later in America for £80, which, I believe, constitutes the top price up to date. Proud of my exploit, I wrote to Alfred offering him the proceeds as more rightfully belonging to him than to me. In his reply, ignoring my monetary offer, he wrote from Trinity College, Cambridge: “At our last Feast I had the new Dean of Westminster next me, and he said he had long been wanting to thank me for the amusement he had derived from my writings, especially about Queen Victoria and her Ministers. So if I bring you money, you bring me fame.”

This was not the only occasion on which we were mistaken for each other by people who ought to have known better. I was once introduced to an audience in his own school hall by the Headmaster of Westminster, as “a classical scholar of European fame.” To avoid exposing his ignorance in the place of his authority, I bowed graciously to the compliment, though I had derisive friends among the audience who knew better.

It happened that, in the same year when *A Shropshire Lad* was published, I went to stay with friends at Buildwas; and finding that Hughley and its steeple were only five miles away, I walked over to have a look at the “far-known sign,” and the graves of suicides on the north side of the tower. When I reached it, I found that the “far-known sign” was buried away in a valley, and that the “suicides”

“SHROPSHIRE LAD” YEAR—AND AFTER

were most of them respectable churchwardens and wives of Vicars, all in neatly tended graves. When I reproached my brother for his romantic falsification of local history, his explanation was that the place he really meant had an ugly name, so he substituted “Hughley.” “I did not know,” he said, “that people would be going on pilgrimages to these sacred places.”

But that is what has now happened. That small book of poems has given to many Shropshire place-names an added romance comparable to that which attaches to the place-names of Thomas Hardy’s novels.

I wonder would that have happened had the poems been published under the title which my brother originally chose for them: *Poems by Terence Hearsay*. It was his college friend, Alfred W. Pollard, who saved him from making that mistake, and suggested *A Shropshire Lad* as the better title.

I have already said that the elder generation were not specially kind to the book on its first appearance. George Meredith, who received a copy from an enthusiastic friend, did not show much liking for it; “an orgy of naturalism” was his description of it; and a note in my brother’s handwriting tells me that, offered in the first place to Messrs. Macmillan for publication, it was refused by them on the advice of their reader, Mr. John Morley.

But over in America it was enthusiastically welcomed. One young American poet, whom I met on my first visit to that country in 1916, told me that, after reading it, he lay awake all night weeping for joy. When I told my brother of this he laughed, but I am sure it pleased him.

“SHROPSHIRE LAD” YEAR—AND AFTER

So also did this story which I was able to pass on to him only two years ago. I had been giving a lecture—not on poetry; at the end a man came up to me and asked if I was the author of *A Shropshire Lad*. I said, “No.” “Any relation?” “Yes, I am his brother.” “Ah, well,” was the kind reply, “that’s something to be proud of. I, too, have a brother who is the better man.”

LAURENCE HOUSMAN.



A. E. HOUSMAN: IN LONDON, 1896

A LONDON MEMOIR

IN 1892 the Classical Department of University College, London, was at a low ebb. The salary the College was able to offer to its professors of Greek and Latin was so small that the two chairs had been united. Professor Alfred Goodwin had broken down under the strain of teaching which the combined professorships involved, and his death left both chairs vacant. When Housman applied for the chair of Latin he was thirty-three years of age; he had entered St. John's College, Oxford, as a scholar in 1877, had taken a First in Moderations in 1879, but had failed in the Final School of Lit. Hum. in 1881. He had since "passed the examinations required for the degree of B.A. and was of standing to take the degree of M.A. in the event of his appointment to a professorship." In 1881 and 1882 he had taught in the Sixth Form at Bromsgrove School. In the latter year he had obtained a Higher Division Clerkship in the Patent Office. There, as I remember from the conversation of a fellow clerk, he had acquired a reputation for sarcastic repartee which was respected even by colleagues who prided themselves on their ability in this form of wit.

A LONDON MEMOIR

He had also during these ten years been contributing papers to learned journals on ancient literature and critical science.

Housman applied for the Latin chair, but with a proviso that, should it be conferred on another, he would ask to be considered as an applicant for the professorship of Greek. He closed his application with the characteristic words: "If I am honoured by your choice I shall give my best endeavours to the fulfilment of my duties and to the maintenance of accurate learning in University College."

Goodwin's Latin chair passed to Housman, his Greek chair to William Wyse. Wyse regarded the shortcomings of his small and unfit flock rather with sorrow than with anger; after two years of disillusionment, he returned to Trinity College, Cambridge, to find students less unworthy of his standard of scholarship. (It is a pleasure, after forty-four years, for an old student to pay a tribute of respect to his exact and patient teaching.)

The journey in the opposite direction, from Trinity College, Cambridge, to University College, London, was made by Wyse's successor, Arthur Platt, though Platt did not come to us directly from Trinity. Platt has told me that Wyse warned him that he must not expect too much of us.

And, as I look back, there seems a strange incongruity between those two mighty scholars, Platt and Housman, and the tiny and, I fear, immature classes they had at first to teach. Indeed, as I read again Housman's sentence about the great scholar Badham being set to teach boys, I have an uneasy feeling that he was thinking of another great scholar teaching boys. If he meant us, the thunder rolled harmlessly over our heads, for though we were mostly under

A LONDON MEMOIR

eighteen, it would never have occurred to us that we were boys.

In his inaugural lecture, Housman discussed the dogma that the study of the Humanities transforms and beautifies man's inner nature by culture. He stated his belief that the proportion of the human race adapted by nature for the study of the Classics was small. (The size of the classes he found waiting for him at University College, London, must have confirmed him in this view.) And, he continued,

I am quite sure that the proportion of the human race on whom the Classics will confer that benefit, can attain the desired end without that minute and accurate study of the classical tongues which affords Latin professors their only excuse for existing.

When we heard these sentences we thought (in our folly) that the speaker would be a lenient censor of our Latin proses. But this was not so. Housman's remarks were so caustic as to paralyse the female section of his class. But what, I think, hurt them more was the fact that, having reduced Miss Brown, Miss Jones and Miss Robinson to tears, Housman professed, when he met them next week, not to know which was Miss Brown, which Miss Jones, and which Miss Robinson. When, after nineteen years of teaching, Housman left us to take the Latin chair at Cambridge, he apologised to his assembled students, past and present, for this lack of memory. A certain Dartmoor shepherd had, just at that time, attained a place in history by getting into prison and out of it. This Dartmoor shepherd knew the faces of all his sheep. Housman ruefully admitted that *he* did not. "But then," he said, "if I had

A LONDON MEMOIR

remembered all your faces, I might have forgotten more important things"—not, he hastened to explain, things more important in themselves, but more important to him; had he burdened his memory by the distinction between Miss Jones and Miss Robinson, he might have forgotten that between the second and fourth declension.

On looking back, I am most astonished at Housman's affability to us, as students—I mean that, however severe his criticism of our work might be, he was willing to meet us in the College Literary Society and at Arts Dinners, and to break a lance with any professor, any junior teacher, or any student who was reckless enough to challenge him. Housman's own description of the University College Literary Society is as follows:—

University College, London, like many other Colleges, is the abode of a Minotaur. This monster does not devour youths and maidens; it consists of them, and it preys for choice on the Professors within its reach. It is called a Literary Society, and in hopes of deserving the name it exacts a periodical tribute from those whom it supposes to be literate. Studious men who might be settling *Hou's* business and properly basing *Own* are expected to provide amusing discourses on subjects of which they have no official knowledge and upon which they may not be entitled even to open their mouths. Platt, whose temper made him accessible, whose pen ran easily, and whose mind was richly stored, paid more of this blackmail than most of his colleagues, and grudged it less.

Housman himself, however, paid this blackmail more cheerfully than might be gathered from his own words. He reminded me of Sir Lancelot in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*—a comparison which, had I ventured to suggest it, would have brought upon my head his fiercest wrath. Each paper

A LONDON MEMOIR

at the Literary Society was followed by a discussion, and you could see Housman

Strike down the lusty and long-practised knight,
And let the younger and unskill'd go by
To win his honour and to make his name.

In these debates Housman, like his colleague Ker, had the power which belong to great personalities, and which belonged to Dr. Johnson: if his pistol missed fire he could knock you down with the butt end. He would make a retort which, from anybody else, would not have been altogether conclusive, but the effect of which as uttered by Housman was devastating. I remember papers by Housman in praise of Matthew Arnold, in which he spoke of Tennyson with some disrespect. He described the argument of *In Memoriam* as being that "things must come right in the end, because it would be so very unpleasant if they did not," adding that, if God had answered Tennyson out of the whirlwind as He answered Job, He would have said, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" In the subsequent debate Platt dropped upon me to speak. I excused myself on the ground that Housman had uttered not merely his own but God's opinion on Tennyson, and that though I was willing to debate with Housman, I could not debate with one who had come armed with God's judgment. So I sat down, quoting Job's excuse for his silence, "Wherefore I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes." I felt somewhat complacently that I had escaped rather well. When Housman rose to reply he said that he could attach no importance to what

A LONDON MEMOIR

Mr. Chambers said, since he had been credibly informed that Mr. Chambers read the *Church Times*. I felt, and everyone in the room felt, that I had been entirely flattened out. This ability to lay an adversary low by a reply which would have been ineffective in the mouth of another man, is the mark of the great debater.

I remember another debate in which I sought to defend the *Idylls of the King* against Housman's strictures by submitting that at any rate, if the *Idylls* had not got the spirit of Malory, they would interest future generations as showing the spirit of the Victorian age. Housman, when his turn came to reply, retorted, "Then, in that case, people will judge that the Victorian age was an age flowing with milk and water."

The judgment that made Matthew Arnold as a poet the equal of Tennyson and Browning, if not their superior, might not perhaps appear as extraordinary to-day, but aroused our surprise when Housman put it forward thirty or forty years ago.

Housman's challenges to the lusty and long-practised knight were not always taken up. I remember a paper he read on Burns when W. P. Ker was present. The paper was packed full of jibes at Scots and Scotsmen, but Ker refused to be drawn. "Forgiveness," Ker began, "is the last refuge of malignity. I will not forgive Professor Housman." And he sat down.

Housman himself sometimes declined battle, and I remember a case when he left Ker in possession of the field. I had just been appointed Librarian, and, with some friends, made a pretty thorough search of the then very neglected

A LONDON MEMOIR

College Library, in the course of which we discovered, among other treasures, a quite unknown Coverdale Bible. I reported this to the Library Committee, possibly with an excess of self-satisfaction which Housman thought ought to be discountenanced. "Would it not be as well," said Housman, "to sell these and buy some really useful books with the proceeds?" "Judas Iscariot once said something of that sort," retorted Ker, and Housman left it at that.

Another occasion on which I remember Housman refusing a challenge was when his brother Laurence came to University College to give a lecture on behalf of women's suffrage. At the end there were loud cries for Alfred Housman to speak. He rose and said:

Birds in their little nests agree:
And 'tis a shameful sight,
When children of one family
Fall out, and chide, and fight.

He then sat down again. Such at least is my recollection, but Mr. Laurence Housman remembers the lines as:

Small birds in their nests agree.
Oh, then, how sad it is to see
A little Christian familiee
Where all the children bite.

I record these variants. They may be of use to those who study the oral transmission of poetry.

Housman differed from his colleague Platt in the care he took that his papers, read before colleagues and students, should not be printed. He gave one of the earliest of the Foundation Orations of University College Union Society,

A LONDON MEMOIR

a discourse which sparkled with all his accustomed wit. It is the habit to print these Orations. We noticed, as Housman went on, that he continued tearing up little bits of paper; we noticed it because such nervous fidgetiness was unlike him. When the President at the end made the usual request for the manuscript, Housman replied that it had been destroyed. As the address proceeded, he had been tearing up each page of his discourse after the other.

If he allowed himself to be blackmailed for papers to student societies, he was equally generous in contributing to the College magazine. I remember extracting *The Parallelogram* from him in the year 1904, under a strict promise that the authorship should not be divulged. It was divulged, but not by me. There were subsequent contributions in 1906 and 1911. In 1935 a younger colleague asked me if I would request Housman's permission to reprint these on a private press which we have at University College. I refused, but suggested that he should see Housman himself. Housman, I said, would suffer young fools gladly, but would not suffer old fools with equal gladness. My young colleague presented himself at Housman's rooms in Trinity, explaining why I thought that he, rather than I, was the person to make the request, and Housman gave us permission to reprint these three poems.

I believe that of all those who gathered to take that last farewell in Trinity College Chapel on 4th May, 1936, his brother Laurence and I were the only ones who had been present at the first Academic discourse Housman ever gave, his Introductory Lecture delivered before the Faculties of Arts and Laws and of Science in University College, Lon-

A LONDON MEMOIR

don, 3rd October, 1892. In those days it was customary to begin the session by an address delivered to his colleagues and the assembled students by one of the professors, and this duty fell naturally to Housman as the latest accession to the staff. Housman's address was a reply to the question: What is the good which we set before us as our end in learning? He dismissed with scorn the utilitarian plea. Science will not make you rich. Men do not become millionaires by their knowledge of Science, though they do sometimes become so by other people's knowledge of Science. Men do not transform and beautify their inner natures by the study of the Classics, though they do learn not to call the muse who presides over dancing *Terpsitschoar*. Why then pursue learning beyond the small amount which will serve our turn? Housman gave the answer in the words of Dante, words which were the favourite quotation of Ker, who was sitting beside him as he spoke; the words in which the aged Ulysses urges his aged companions, in that brief vigil of their senses that remains, to make their voyage of exploration beyond the pillars of Hercules:

“Consider of what seed ye are sprung: ye were not formed to live like brutes, but to follow virtue and knowledge.” For knowledge (Housman went on) resembles virtue in this, and differs in this from other possessions, that it is not merely a means of procuring good, but is good in itself simply; it is not a coin which we pay down to purchase happiness, but it has happiness indissolubly bound up with it. Fortitude and continence and honesty are not commended to us on the ground that they conduce, as on the whole they do conduce, to material success, nor yet on the ground that they will be rewarded hereafter: those whose office it is to exhort mankind to virtue are ashamed to degrade the cause they plead by proffering such lures as

A LONDON MEMOIR

these. And let us too disdain to take lower ground in commending knowledge; let us insist that the pursuit of knowledge, like the pursuit of righteousness, is part of man's duty to himself; and remember the Scripture where it is written: "He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul."

It was right that we should take our farewell of Housman in that Chapel which is associated with the memory of many other men who shared Housman's passion for truth. Looking across at us was the statue

Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
The marble index of a mind for ever
Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone.

None had ever made the voyage in more utter loneliness than had Housman. It came rather as a surprise to learn that he had written a hymn to be sung at this time, and even chosen the music, a Melody by Melchior Vulpius, harmonized by J. S. Bach.

O thou that from thy mansion
Through time and place to roam,
Dost send abroad thy children,
And then dost call them home,

That men and tribes and nations
And all thy hand hath made
May shelter them from sunshine
In thine eternal shade:

We now to peace and darkness
And earth and thee restore
Thy creature that thou madest
And wilt cast forth no more.

R. W. CHAMBERS.

SCHOLAR

WHEN A. E. Housman was elected to a scholarship at St. John's in the late seventies, how many of his electors guessed that this was a young man who would be unique not only in his own age but in any age? For the first time in her history Oxford can claim to have nourished the greatest Latin scholar of his generation; and for the first time in the history of the world she can claim to have nourished a great scholar and a great poet in one and the same person. But alas! how much did this nourishment amount to? Was it really she who suckled him? She proffered both her breasts indeed, and from one he drew, for he obtained a First Class in Classical Honour Moderations; but the other he wilfully refused: for the Final Honour School of Literae Humaniores, her noblest academic food, he had so strong a distaste that he neither won nor wanted distinction in it. Nor did early manhood cure him of perversity. On going down from Oxford, where he left behind him, we are told, a reputation for skilful versifying and a light head, he entered, perverse as ever, H.M. Patent Office, where he is said to have been

SCHOLAR

the worst clerk they ever had. But he was engaged in more important business, papers for the *Journal of Philology* on the Greek tragedians and on Horace and Propertius. Already in less than ten years he was the obvious choice for the chair of Latin at London University, and in nineteen more he was the only man in England worthy to succeed Munro in the Kennedy Professorship at Cambridge.

If, then, Oxford can claim only a very small share in his education, to what qualities of his own was the supremacy of his scholarship due? Some scholars, as Housman said of Arthur Palmer, have penetration of thought and brilliance in conjectural emendation, but small intellectual range or not enough industry; others, as he said of Robinson Ellis, possess a storehouse of "ample and unborrowed learning," but "the mind of an idiot child." Very few have all the requirements; Housman had them all, and to an astonishing degree. And as if Nature had not blessed him enough already, she added unto him a retentive memory, a fierce intellectual honesty which would neither condone or extenuate, a lucidity of exposition which would be the envy of all lawyers if they read him, a wit for lashing fools more humorous, if not more mordant, than even Bentley's, and a mastery of English prose such that lovers of the language must curse the misfortune by which so much of what he said had to be said in Latin. He first showed his intellectual power and his skill in conducting with lucidity a long and complicated argument in his demolition of the unsound fabrics raised by editors over the manuscripts of Propertius. His industry may be inferred from the wide range of authors and works from which he quotes, or from his meticulous

SCHOLAR

care over details of grammar and orthography as well as from his great learning in every field, especially astronomy, connected with classical scholarship; but it may well be that posterity will admire him most for his skill in conjectural emendation. This it is easier to praise than to appraise, for his chief work was done on Manilius, an author so difficult and so little read that there is scarcely any one alive who can rightly estimate his achievement. He knew this, and so "the reader," he writes, "whose good opinion I desire and have done my utmost to secure is the next Bentley or Scaliger who may chance to occupy himself with Manilius." This was arrogance, nor did he deny it; but his arrogance was usually tempered with justice: he did not withhold praise where it was due, and even from the unfortunate German editor of Manilius, for whom he reserved his wittiest mockery, he accepted one emendation, though only one, in his own text. His only published works besides his commentary on Manilius were his editions of Juvenal and Lucan, but these are not the only authors indebted to him: he did as much as any contemporary scholar (and in most cases more) for the text of Lucilius, Persius, Lucretius, Horace, Propertius, Ovid, Martial, Statius, and the minor Latin Poets; and in Greek he showed the same skill in emending some of the new papyrus fragments.

Of his achievement in poetry it is still too early to speak. Beyond a few early poems published in various magazines, his whole work amounts to only a hundred and four short lyrics, and possibly nothing even of these would have been published but for the occurrence of some event—now a

SCHOLAR

secret, but to be revealed, we understand from *The Times* obituary, after a few years—an event which caused the continuous excitement under the severe stress of which he wrote most of *A Shropshire Lad* in 1895. No one would deny the austere perfection of the form and diction of these lyrics; but though they have won the highest praise from critics so different as Robert Bridges, Walter Raleigh, and Mr. Cecil Day Lewis, they have suffered in the estimation of the general public from their very austerity. Many miss in them the usual signs of “a fine, careless rapture,” and, knowing their origin, have suspected them to be the fruit of craft and labour rather than of inspiration. That this suspicion is unfounded must have been proved, even to those who cannot detect poetic genius in “With rue my heart is laden” or “the sumless tale of sorrow” or “the roaring wood of dreams” and a hundred other magic phrases, by what Housman himself said of his last poem in *A Shropshire Lad*, half of which came into his head exactly as it was afterwards printed, though the other half had to be laboriously composed.

There is no doubt that Housman's sober attention to form he owed to his classical reading; and in an age in which neglect of form seems the first requirement of a poet, he is likely to be discredited. But “the rusted wheel of things” will revolve again. In 1892 Housman wrote of Milton: “The dignity, the sanity, . . . the just subordination of detail, the due adaptation of means to ends, the high respect of the craftsman for his craft and for himself, which ennoble Virgil and the great Greeks, are all to be found in Milton, and nowhere else in English literature are they

SCHOLAR

all to be found." It may well be that the lyric poets of the future, looking for these things in vain among the coteries of the twentieth century, will turn, for their touchstone of literary merit, to the poetry of Housman.

ALAN KER.

CAMBRIDGE

IN the year 1911, after the death of John Mayor, who had held the chair of Latin for thirty-eight years, it cannot be said that the choice of Housman to succeed him was inevitable, for there were Cambridge Latinists of established reputation and Housman's career had been odd. He had gone up to St. John's College, Oxford, from Bromsgrove School in 1877, and after taking a First in Mods. had failed in Greats. It must have been known in Oxford that the last feat was due to the fact that he preferred to sit in his rooms emending Propertius rather than follow the curriculum prescribed for Greats; but a plough is no passport to academic preferment, and after a brief period as Sixth Form Master at Bromsgrove, Housman retired to the Patent Office, where he spent his time, I believe, in registering trademarks. No doubt he did it with the punctilious accuracy which is characteristic of all his work ("Accuracy," he wrote many years later, "is a duty and not a virtue"), but the ten years so spent left him some leisure for more congenial employment, and from time to time he published papers on classical themes, the most notable being a long

and brilliant series of emendations in the *Agamemnon*, and in Propertius, of whom he was then projecting an edition with a commentary. In 1892 he stood successfully for the Professorship of Latin at University College, London, submitting seventeen highly laudatory testimonials from distinguished scholars in England and abroad, and a statement which contains the sentence, "In 1881 I failed to obtain honours in the Final School of Litterae Humaniores." Thenceforward he was free to devote himself entirely to the studies for which he was probably better equipped by nature than any other English scholar of the last hundred years.

The nineteen years at University College produced a substantial body of work—texts of the *Ibis* and of Juvenal in Postgate's *Corpus*, a separate text of Juvenal, an edition of the first book of Manilius; and a number of articles in learned journals which showed not only a mind of unusual penetration, but also so complete mastery of the technique of scholarship that the work of other scholars tended, beside his, to look amateurish. It was noticeable, too, that whereas his early papers had been as often upon Greek as upon Latin writers, he was concentrating more and more upon Latin poetry. He was once asked why he had given up writing about Greek and replied, "I found I could not attain to excellence in both"; and for a scholar whose ideals were so austere some limitation was inevitable. "A scholar," he wrote, "who means to build himself a monument, must spend much of his life in acquiring knowledge which for its own sake is not worth having, and in reading books which do not in themselves deserve to be read." By



A. E. HOUSMAN, FROM A DRAWING BY FRANCIS DODD, 1926

CAMBRIDGE

the time he reached Cambridge, and indeed before it, this severe self-discipline was complete, and the remainder of his life was fruitful. It included a text of Lucan, editions of the four remaining books of Manilius, and a steady flow of articles in the classical journals, many of them long, and nearly all of the first importance.

The time is not yet ripe, nor is this the place, to attempt a valuation of his work as a whole. A critic once wrote of him as the first scholar in Europe. "It is not true," said Housman, "and if it were, — would not know it." He was thinking presumably of Wilamowitz, and between these two we may be content to leave the palm, but if, as I am sure, it was Housman's ambition to leave a name which would be remembered with the great Latinists of the past—with Madvig and Lachmann, with Bentley and Heinsius and Scaliger, there can be little doubt that his ambition was achieved. If, however, it must be left to posterity to assess his permanent contribution to the criticism and elucidation of ancient literature, something may already be said of Housman as a teacher, for his influence upon a whole generation of scholars has been profound. Outside Cambridge, whether in England or abroad, his disregard of shibboleths and fashions, and his scathing indictments of charlatanry in scholarship began some time ago to take effect, and in his retrospect of the twenty-seven years which separated Book 1 of Manilius from Book 5 he showed that he was aware of the fact. In Cambridge, where the written word was reinforced by direct teaching, the effect was much quicker. His disciples were more numerous when he first came to Cambridge than in later

CAMBRIDGE

years, for the austerities of scholarship were less out of fashion then than now, and Housman's lectures made a definite demand upon his audience. To call them inspiring would perhaps be to convey the wrong idea, but nobody with tastes at all akin to his own could witness that easy mastery of the relevant learning, that lucid exposition and dispassionate judgment, without setting before himself a new ideal of scholarship. And if Housman's audiences were never very numerous, they were very devoted, and they usually included besides undergraduates a few older men who found time amid their teaching to go on learning, and knew where best to learn.

In 1911 Housman had to his credit not only the classical work already mentioned but *A Shropshire Lad*; and to the younger among us at any rate he was best known by that slim volume of verse, and by the prefaces to the editions of Juvenal and Manilius, in which various principles of textual criticism were set out with penetrating clarity, and the follies and blunders of eminent scholars who had disregarded them were exposed with so much wit that even those who had small pretensions to judge the questions at issue could read the polemic with delight. *A Shropshire Lad* and the prefaces presented, however, a piquant contrast, and Housman was at characteristic pains to underline it in his inaugural lecture. A scholar, he said, had no more concern with the merits of the literature with which he dealt than Linnaeus or Newton with the beauties of the countryside or of the starry heavens. But the contrast is less complete than appears; in Housman's passionate invectives against the "frailties and aberrations of the human

CAMBRIDGE

mind, and of its insubordinate servants, the human fingers," it is not hard to hear the voice of the Shropshire Lad turned critic; and though Housman was serious in subordinating the rôle of the literary man to that of the scholar, he knew well, and said in print, that just literary perception and congenial intimacy with one's author were a necessary part of an emendator's equipment. And if, as I think, the ruling passions of his life were devotion to high poetry and devotion to truth, it was the combination of the two which made his work as a scholar possible.

It was the second of these passions, I fancy, which set the tone of his controversial writings, the severity of which gave some people a lasting mistrust of their author, and, on the Continent at any rate, delayed for a time the recognition of Housman's importance. It is probable, indeed, that Housman took an artistic pleasure in plying a weapon which he wielded so skilfully, but the more fundamental cause is given in a sentence of his Juvenal:

Frailty of understanding is in itself no proper target for scorn and mockery: "*nihil in eo odio dignum, misericordia digna multa.*" But the unintelligent forfeit their claim to compassion when they begin to indulge in self-complacent airs, and to call themselves sane critics, meaning that they are mechanics.

"There is no rivalry," he had written in the noble defence of learning which closed his London Inaugural Lecture, "there is no rivalry between the studies of Arts and Laws and Science but the rivalry of fellow soldiers in striving which can most victoriously achieve the common end of all, to set back the frontier of darkness." Those guilty of intellectual slovenliness or dishonesty were traitors to that

CAMBRIDGE

high cause and deserved no mercy. The scholarly world into which this *enfant terrible* was born was full of shams and pretensions, and it is no little part of his life's work that it is now much less so.

Housman's poetry, and his Leslie Stephen lecture on *The Name and Nature of Poetry* have made his name familiar to thousands who have never heard of Manilius or Lucan, but those three volumes will be written of elsewhere by more competent critics; and since in the hierarchy of scholars his name must, on any estimate, stand higher than in that of poets, I may be forgiven in *The Cambridge Review* for passing over with a word a memorial much more conspicuous and perhaps not less lasting than his contributions to learning. For though to some of the younger generation his poetry now seems a little out of date, and his view of poetry is distasteful, it is difficult to believe that *A Shropshire Lad* and *Last Poems* will ever disappear from view, or that the Leslie Stephen lecture can lose its interest as a poet's record of his own spiritual experiences.

In private life it is probable that many who came into contact with Housman found him alarming, and it was natural to approach with circumspection one whose pen was like a rapier. And when he first came to Cambridge he was sometimes apt, from shyness, to suspect a liberty where none was intended and to be sharp-tongued in answer. As he grew more at home and more sure of his neighbours such incidents were less common, but though, in a small circle round the dinner table, he would sometimes talk vivaciously, he was in general a solitary and silent man, conversation with whom involved some effort. He was

CAMBRIDGE

aware of this ("I have no small talk," he said), and grateful to those who made the effort, but he did not encourage intimacy, and though he must have had familiar friends of an earlier date, it is probable that none even of those who knew him best in Cambridge would claim to have known him intimately or to have wholly understood him. These restrictions, however, were of his own choice, and I have no doubt that he was happy here. "The University," he once wrote, "has been very good to me, and has given me a post in which I have duties which are not disagreeable, and opportunity for studies which I enjoy and in which I can hope to do the University credit." That they did the University credit needs no saying, nor that his place will be hard indeed to fill, but there are those who will think of Housman not only with admiration for his extraordinary qualities of mind and with gratitude for his teaching, but also with affection for a friend whose warmth of heart, if sedulously concealed, was never in doubt.

A. S. F. Gow.



"CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE"

The Muse. "OH, ALFRED, WE HAVE MISSED YOU! MY LAD! MY SHROPSHIRE LAD!"

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"Punch," Oct. 25, 1922

POET

When summer's end is nighing
And skies at evening cloud,
I muse on change and fortune
And all the feats I vowed
When I was young and proud.

YOUTH and its pride, its passions and aspirations—these are the theme of Housman's poetry, whether he speaks as a young man with the world before him, or as an ageing man moved by the spectacle of others' youth or the recollection of his own. And because it expresses authentically the emotions, above all the unhappiness, of youth, and because its form is easy and its content has the charm of the simple, at times of the sentimental, his verse appeals almost unfailingly to those who themselves are young, and is the delight, not only of the severest critics, but of many readers who do not in the ordinary way care for poetry.

Whether he is looking forward or looking back on life, Housman's attitude towards it is the same; he seems early

POET

to have assumed that Stoic posture in maintaining which he never faltered; and the passions of youth are in his verse made more intense by the prescience of a disillusion which to most comes only with the years. For him, experience confirmed, it did not reveal; his despair is the preconceived and deadly despair of one who has the whole of life in front of him. His verse reflects his own immobility: it did not develop; in essentials, it did not change; and it is not to be wondered at that, for all their freshness, his *Last Poems* were but a continuation of *A Shropshire Lad*.

Despite this uniformity, which characterises the form of his verse (though subtly varied, a few strict and simple metres were used by him throughout) as well as the sensibility that underlies it, there is no monotony in Housman's poetry, and it serves as a vehicle for a wide range of emotions.

There are, to begin with, a number of poems (and these, though not always his best, have won him much of his celebrity) in which, speaking in the character of his "Shropshire Lad"—with how deep a foundation of personal experience must remain a matter for conjecture—he describes picturesquely romantic incidents and situations, which involve not infrequently death in battle or at the hangman's hands. Then there are a number of poems, and among these are some of his best, in which without any framework of convention, speaking apparently in his own person, he expresses the emotions that spring from human relationships—sometimes, passionate affection for the living—

POET

Ah, past the plunge of plummet,
In seas I cannot sound,
My heart and soul and senses,
World without end, are drowned.

His folly has not fellow
Beneath the blue of day
Who gives to man or woman
His heart and soul away—

more often *desiderium* for the dead:

The night is freezing fast,
To-morrow comes December;
And winterfalls of old
Are with me from the past;
And chiefly I remember
How Dick would hate the cold.

His finest poems, however, are those which express not the emotions which arise from man's relations with his fellow men, but feelings inspired by contemplation of his relation to the universe. Here that resolute despair, which, broken only by outbursts of passionate resentment, is the undertone of all Housman's verse, finds its noblest utterance:

Now, and I muse for why and never find the reason,
I pace the earth, and drink the air, and feel the sun.
Be still, be still, my soul; it is but for a season:
Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.

Ay, look: high heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation;
All thoughts to rive the heart are here, and all are vain:
Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation—
Oh why did I awake? when shall I sleep again?

POET

In a world where God and man and their laws seemed hostile, and he himself an alien—cast out, as he says, to roam through time and place—he found comfort, his poems tell us, only in Nature; and a love of Nature, and in particular of the countryside where he was bred, is the one other inspiration of his verse:

In my own shire, if I was sad,
Homely comforters I had:
The earth, because my heart was sore,
Sorrowed for the son she bore;
And standing hills, long to remain,
Shared their short-lived comrade's pain.
And bound for the same bourn as I,
On every road I wandered by,
Trod beside me, close and dear,
The beautiful and death-struck year.

It is easy to recognise Housman himself in the country boy of his earlier book, exiled in London among the crowds of "men whose thoughts are not as mine," surrounded by faces of fellow-citizens "too unhappy to be kind," and pining for the lost comfort and companionship of Nature. And in his later volume he throws aside even this thin convention, echoing the same feelings in one of the latest and loveliest of his poems:

Tell me not here, it needs not saying,
What tunes the enchantress plays
In aftermaths of soft September
Or under blanching may,
For she and I were long acquainted
And I knew all her ways.

POET

These quotations will have shown the quality not only of Housman's inspiration, but also of his technique: the directness of expression, the felicity of diction, the economy in the use of imagery, the sparing employment of the adjective—all unite to justify the application of the epithet "classical" to the form of his verse. And, though no poet is less a "literary" poet than he, it is clear that his verse owes in every line a debt to his familiarity with the Authorised Version, with English ballad literature, and with the classics of Greek and Latin poetry. It is, in truth, as "classical" in form as it is "romantic" in feeling; and a strange union of deep passion with severe restraint characterises his poetry as it seems to have characterised his life itself.

Composition did not come easily to him; in his lecture on *The Name and Nature of Poetry* he described not only the effect of others' poetry upon him, but the circumstances in which he came to write his own—it was in part a conscious, in part an unconscious, process: and the necessity of writing seems always to have been avoided rather than sought. And though there plainly went to the polishing of his poems the care of an artist, and a skill acquired largely by study of the best models, these were not, one feels, a loving care, or a skill in the exercise of which he took a poet's pleasure, but rather the pains which he felt it his duty to bestow on disburdening himself in a not unworthy manner of a weight of emotion which he had carried in his breast from his earliest days, and which at times grew too great for him to bear.

JOHN SPARROW.

FAREWELL TO A.E.H.

*Extract from a letter written from Trinity College, Cambridge, May 1, 1936, by his nephew, N. V. H.
Symons, M.C., I.C.S.*

WE went up to the Nursing Home this afternoon and saw him lying in their little chapel—just a still form covered with a fine linen sheet over which was a gold and purple silk pall, and an altar behind. I uncovered his face and I thought he had not changed much since I last saw him twelve years ago. As Uncle Laurence said, his expression was “Imperious Roman,” and it was a fine face with the lips and cheeks still holding colour in some mysterious way as if he were yet living. There was great composure and firmness of expression, and the look on the face was that of a man who had met the storms of life and faced and fought them. I cannot call it serene, it still held what I can only describe as a proud challenge—“I am captain of my soul and master of my fate; do your worst; I scorn you.” Indeed, his fea-

FAREWELL TO A.E.H.

tures in death were a mirror of all he had suffered from life, and of his attitude to it—it was the face of an autocrat and an aristocrat facing a silly mob and defying it.

I placed my warm hand on his cool forehead in farewell, and we left.

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